TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

MAY 16-31, 2008 ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR VOL. 15, NO. 10

Laura Bush puts her foot in it

How the U.S. Has Tried to Use Burma's Cyclone to Spy Out Ground for Intervention

By Peter Lee

America's persistent promotion of its anti-junta/pro-Burmese democracy agenda after the cyclone offers an illustration of the risks of a confrontational values-based foreign policy when the unexpected occurs.

In the case of Burma there were three unexpected events that altered the political as well as physical geography of the region: the immense catastrophe made pouring aid into Burma a humanitarian imperative; the junta revealed its ability to exploit the suffering of the victims as if it was another international commodity like jade or teak; and the ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) demonstrated its unwillingness to act as a vehicle for America's anti-junta policy.

China has taken advantage of the disaster to shed its role as sole public protector of the Myanmar junta. Now it has been encouraging Myanmar to internationalize and engage with ASEAN in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.

ASEAN, apparently eager to claim a significant regional role for itself, has responded by positioning itself as the intermediary for foreign aid to Myanmar, setting up a field office and organizing a donors' pledge conference in Yangon, and participating in the "Tripartite Core Group" – an ASEANB/U.N./Myanmar aid coordination committee that will meet once a month in Myanmar.

Most significantly, ASEAN has stepped up to pre-empt the U.S. demand that

LEE CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Why Blacks Keep Quiet About Obama

By Kevin Alexander Gray

A lot of black people I know have hit the mute button. When Hillary brings up working class white voters. When commentators say we're in the post-racial era. Even when Barack had to kick his preacher to the curb. "Where were Obama's friends?" *The Wall Street Journal*'s Daniel Henninger asked. Quiet, quiet, quiet.

The current undertone in the black cultural cosmos reflects the old adage, "If you can't say some good, don't say anything at all." The way to show racial solidarity? Shush up.

Black people always have to navigate race fear; the long Democratic primary season has just underlined that. Joking, comedian Jon Stewart asked Obama, if elected, "Will you pull a bait and switch and enslave the white race?" Kinda funny. Except that's precisely the sentiment that underlies white race fear. I've heard the same thing said in seriousness by more than one white person. "If Obama gets the White House what will they want next?" Or, "if Obama wins, blacks will think they're running things."

So, one argument for keeping quiet is to avoid confirming or fueling white racist suspicions. A caller on one of the radio shows I did after Reverend Wright's National Press Club appearance said, "[Obama] has to convince white folk that he's 150 per cent with them. So we should just all be quiet and let him do what he has to do."

Give a listen to the corporate media, and it's pretty clear what tune black voices are supposed to be singing. Obama is constantly called on to swear allegiance to America – to prove he isn't swearing allegiance to blacks. The other way to say that is he's supposed to swear allegiance to white, not black, America. Meanwhile, the back end of that deal is that black Americans are required to substitute Obama for real structural racial progress. As in, "You got your nominee. See, we're not so racist or bad after all. Now shut up!"

I was talking on the phone to a friend the day after Obama denounced his preacher. She wasn't mad at either of them, just blue over "the whole mess." Like many others, she saw the media as the culprit for blowing the incident up, and wondered aloud if Hillary didn't have something to do with it. She agreed with Wright's politics, felt the hurt between the two men, and recognized that the over-expansive persona many black preachers carry around doesn't play everywhere. The Press Club is not a black church. On Obama: "Yeah, he saying what he got to say. He's a politician." And her advice to me? That I not write or say anything "that would give the other side anything to latch on to." In other words, the mute button, the race gag.

Wright was Obama's "fish." Or that's what we called it when I was coming up. It's the "bad nigger" that all "good blacks" would be wise to avoid: the latest Sistah Souljah or Willie Horton. Farrakhan didn't take the bait, so Wright got the hook. Before Wright, Chris Matthews and his cohorts dangled Jesse Jackson out there, often repeating the line that Obama "is not like Jesse Jackson," so as to make Jackson's name (and his politics, importance, "style" and period) a pejorative.

Who knows who will be the next black bogeyman? It could be Obama's fellow Chicagoan Congressman Bobby Rush; he was once a Black Panther. Or, Trinity church's new pastor, Otis Moss. He said that he likes slain rapper Tupac Shakur, whose mother was also a Black Panther. What about James Cone, "the source" of that "radical," "anti-white," "anti-capitalist" "revolutionary" "socialist" black lib-

GRAY CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

threatens the Myanmar regime the most – for independent foreign assessment teams to travel through the delta freely in order to determine the nature and extent of the crisis and the composition and distribution of aid, and perhaps provide the evidentiary grounds for humanitarian intervention.

Calls for humanitarian intervention in Burma predate by almost two years the current crisis and western fascination with extension of the "responsibility to protect" (R2P, as it's known) mandate of the United Nations to Burma, as championed by France's foreign minister and rabid humanitarian interventionist, Bernard Kouchner. In September 2006, the United States succeeded in placing the Burma question on the permanent agenda of the U.N. Security Council on the assumption (explicitly repudiated by China) that the regime's internal repression created a threat to regional peace that mandated intervention by the UNSC. Even under relatively normal, pre-disaster conditions, the United States was already prepared to make the case for humanitarian intervention.

So, a pressing and pre-existing concern for the Myanmar government is to prevent an aggressive U.S. assessment team from making judgments as to whether the Myanmar army's cyclone response crossed the line from "inadequate" to "criminally mismanaged and justifying international control over the aid effort" or "crime against humanity requiring international intervention".

A lot of attention has focused on the travails of the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) DART (Disaster Assistance Response Team) that has been cooling its heels in Thailand.

Very little reporting was devoted to the fact that an ASEAN ERAT (Emergency Relief Assessment Team) had already visited Myanmar in mid-May and reported to ASEAN in Singapore on May 19.

Now, ASEAN is dispatching its ERAT team to Myanmar for an in-depth one-month investigation, which began on June 1, that will presumably supply the professional and credible independent assessment of the situation on the ground that's needed in order to extract aid from foreign governments and international NGOs – but not prepare an adversarial bill of indictment of the regime's response to the catastrophe.

It will be interesting to see if the United States makes some moves toward conciliation with the Myanmar regime in order to get William Berger's respected DART team into the delta, or decides to stick to its maximalist demands and use Myanmar's exclusion of the team as a justification for opposing increased international aid.

If politics rules the day, that might place the United States in the awkward position of ignoring or badmouthing the ASEAN assessment in order to advance the narrative of criminal mismanagement by the Myanmar regime in the aftermath of the cyclone.

Given ASEAN's active and apolitical engagement with the Myanmar regime, the question is, what political advantage can or should the United States salvage from the situation in Burma.

Prior to Cyclone Nargis, the Burmese opposition and the Bush administration had a full slate of counterprogramming prepared for May, as the junta proceeded with efforts to legitimize its rule with a referendum on a new draft constitution.

Scot Marciel was confirmed as the first U.S. ambassador to ASEAN (a China-free regional bloc considered more amenable to the U.S.A. than the UNSC on Burmese matters) in April 2008, with the express mission of organizing ASEAN pressure on Burma. In an online chat from Kuala Lumpur on April 29, he framed the U.S. position on the referendum:

"The regime's draft constitution lacks credibility, as it was drafted in secret by a hand-picked group. It is already clear that the regime's constitutional referendum, scheduled for May 10, will be neither free, fair, nor credible."

As the *L.A. Times* Calendar section reported, a full slate of Hollywood celebrity statements supporting the Burmese opposition – featuring Will Ferrell, Sylvester Stallone, Jennifer Aniston, Anjelica Houston, Judd Apatow, and others – began streaming May 1 on the uscampaignforburma.org site to raise public awareness.

On May 2, President Bush expanded U.S. sanctions to freeze for the first time assets of three state-owned Burmese companies.

The festival of anti-junta activity continued even after Nargis dramatically changed the Burma equation.

The Bush administration seemed captive to its own existing momentum, inertia, principles, or priorities and found itself unable to change gears to address the dilemma of how to deal with the Myanmar junta on disaster relief.

On May 5 – the first working day in Washington after the cyclone hit – first lady Laura Bush, whose primary public policy cause is Burmese democracy, announced that the president would sign legislation awarding Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal to "let the people of Burma know that the United States is standing with them."

There's no indication that postponing the ceremony – and not sticking a finger in the junta's eye in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone – was considered.

Mrs. Bush also put her foot in it by seeming to put the democracy agenda and anti-referendum talking points ahead of disaster relief, as the pro-dissident *Irrawaddy Times* reported:

"Much of the Burmese community was surprised and shocked by comments made by the U.S. first lady who said the United States will consider sending relief assistance to Burma only if the Burmese military junta accepts a U.S. disaster assistance response team to assess the scope of the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis. "Speaking on May 5

CounterPunch

EDITORS
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Alevtina Rea

BUSINESS
Becky Grant
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN
Tiffany Wardle

COUNSELOR
Ben Sonnenberg

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
www.counterpunch.org
All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the White House, Laura Bush said, 'If we can get some sort of team in there to assess what the other needs are, then I feel very assured that the United States government will follow with [greater assistance].'

"'The U.S. first lady's political demands were inappropriate,' said Aung Naing Oo, an exiled Burmese political analyst. 'This is a time when people are dying and suffering to a horrible degree, so if the U.S. really wants to help, it can help without making political demands,' he said.

"Aung Naing Oo suggested that the U.S. might get no response from the junta due to Mrs. Bush's demands. 'She might get nothing in return,' he said."

On May 6, President Bush signed the legislation giving Aung San Suu Kyi her medal in absentia, stating:

"This is a fitting tribute to a courageous woman who speaks for freedom for all the people of Burma and who speaks in such a way that she's a powerful voice, in contrast to the junta that currently rules the country."

At the time, Aung San Suu Kyi, like many of her compatriots fortunate enough to survive the storm, was in a roofless house lit by candlelight and, it is fair to assume, calling for humanitarian assistance for Burma rather than freedom.

President Bush also announced further aid to Burma, a sanctions waiver that would allow small contributions to Burma disaster relief, and repeated calls for the admission of the USAID DART team. And the United States attempted to put the "aid linked to access" embarrassment behind it.

On May 17, as Burma lay prostrated by Nargis, President Bush extended the U.S. (not Burmese) state of national emergency (which enables sanctions by executive order without the fuss and muss of congressional input) against the regime for another year:

Bush said he ordered the extension of sanctions beyond the anniversary date of May 20, 2008, in part because the junta is still "engaging in large-scale repression of the democratic opposition in Burma," and other policies that pose "an unusual and extraordinary threat" to U.S. national security. "For this reason, I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency with respect to Burma and maintain in force the sanctions against Burma to respond to this threat."

The United States then spent weeks complaining bitterly but ineffectually about the conduct of the constitutional referendum. It also advanced the claim that the junta was refusing aid, culminating in calls for forcible humanitarian intervention by the West's militaries.

Unwilling or unable to force the issue, France's helicopter carrier Mistral – the symbol of Western R2P resolve – abandoned its quest to directly deliver aid to the delta and instead has steamed off to Phuket in high dudgeon to offload its supplies for transshipment by nonmilitary carriers to Yangon.

It is clear Washington had a policy suited toward a festering crisis in Burma-but it does not appear to have a positive strategy to address the Burmese issue or engage the Myanmar regime in the aftermath of a titanic humanitarian catastrophe.

Actually, as the rest of the world knew well, the junta was extremely keen for aid and assistance – which it was receiving in large part from heroic in-country NGOs such as the Red Cross and friendly or neutral Asian nations – and on advantageous political terms that the West was loathe to provide.

Beating up on the Burmese junta is, of course, a bipartisan American affair.

The House Foreign Relations Committee hosted an afternoon of testimony on the Burma situation on May 20, largely devoted to attacking the junta and including some geopolitical advice from Dr. Sein Win, prime minister of the Burmese government-in-exile (and Aung San Suu Kyi's first cousin) that I, personally, would not take to the bank:

"Like-minded countries can form an 'International Coalition of Mercy' which will wholeheartedly be welcomed by an overwhelming majority of people of Burma, including the rank and file in the military. Since the Coalition is there to save lives and with the popular support of the people of Burma, we do not foresee China extending military support to the junta to counter the move. Besides, China is currently occupied with the recent earthquake disaster and the Olympic Games and will not risk damaging its image or causing tension by siding with the Burmese generals whom the Chinese leaders know are way beyond redemption."

From a pro-democracy perspective, on reflection, Dr. Sein Win might decide that openly calling for an invasion of Burma is not going to help his followers inside the country in their interactions with the regime concerning that democratic transition.

In passing, it will not be surprising if political unrest in Burma takes an anti-Chinese turn, as it has in places like Tonga and the Solomon Islands that have a resented Chinese commercial and political presence. The *L.A. Times*' expedition to the delta yielded an interview with an angry monk who alleged that international aid was being diverted by the army for sale "in Chinatown." However, in their congressional testimony, Scot Marciel and USAID's Gregory Gottlieb – no buddies of the junta – stated that the U.S. Embassy was monitoring the markets in Yangon and had as yet seen no evidence of aid diversion and profiteering.

Since the United States has long since dealt itself out of any constructive engagement with the Myanmar regime, a case could be made that it might as well pound away at the shortcomings of the government.

Problem is, by mid-May the ASEAN train has already left the station – minus the political baggage — also leaving on the platform the seemingly unrealistic U.S. hope that escalating pressure orchestrated through ASEAN will force the Myanmar regime to negotiate a transfer of power to a democratic government.

Regionally, heated denunciations of the ineptitude, criminal callousness, and corruption of the Myanmar regime simply confirm the generals' decision to turn to ASEAN and its assessment team, while keeping the door shut to the United States.

The *Irrawaddy Times* reports that disgust, despair and anger have spilled

LEE CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GRAYCONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

eration theology ? FOX television seems to think Cone and his ideology deserve denouncing.

On several of the black radio shows I did, callers were split down the middle on Wright and Obama. Most callers – white and black – had no trouble understanding the differing prospective of a church born out a history of enslavement versus one that often condoned or turned a blind eye to enslavement. Most agreed with Wright's take on American history and where the country is today in regards to its relationship with the rest of the world. On Joy Cardin's Wisconsin Public Radio program, most callers were sympathetic to Wright even after his Press Club appearance. They thought he had the right to say what he said, how he said it, and when he said it. As for Obama, callers were most anguished about him having to reject his minister and play the denunciation game.

And with that anguish came the slam on Wright. Which, for Obama's supporters, on black radio was pretty much the same slam they gave Tavis Smiley: he hadn't maintained the gag rule.

Smiley's violation occurred when he criticized Obama's refusal to address or attend any gathering that seemed too black, including Smiley's "State of the Black Union" in New Orleans and the Memphis events around the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Black folk started "hatin' on" Smiley because they saw him as "hatin' on Obama." After a period of "not feeling the love," Smiley left his morning spot on the popular Tom Joyner radio show.

The logic I heard during the time Smiley took his lumps was: "Look, Obama's already got us, we aren't the people he needs to convince," and, "if he spends too much time with us, we know how white folk will react." Translation: "Don't hate the player, hate the game."

Yet racial solidarity is not just in play among blacks. It's evident among some of Hillary Clinton's white support. The difference is that a higher percentage of Clinton's supporters – some 17 per cent of white voters in Pennsylvania – expressed, "they wouldn't vote for a black under any condition."

Why are whites who support Clinton supposedly racist and Obama's black support not labeled as such? My response has been that fundamentally racism is about power, and blacks hold little if any power over whites. Blacks have long voted for white candidates. Support for Bill Clinton, "first black president" mythology included, is evidence of that.

Hillary is accused of campaigning on racist implications: that people would not vote for a black solely because of race. Fair or not, when your campaign represents a racist perspective, you might get called a racist. Moreover, if Obama used a similar language about "hard-working American blacks not being represented," or something like that, he would be relabeled "the black candidate." Clinton is allowed to be the "women's candidate."

Who knows who will be the next black bogeyman? It could be Obama's fellow Chicagoan Congressman Bobby Rush; he was once a Black Panther.

Both can be "generational candidates," but neither can be "race candidates."

Ask me to pick between Wright and Obama? Well, I agree with history. "The United States of America government, when it came to treating her citizens of Indian descent fairly, she failed. She put them on reservations. When it came to treating her citizens of Japanese descent fairly, she failed. She put them in internment prison camps. When it came to treating citizens of African descent fairly, America failed. She put them in chains. The government put them on slave quarters, put them on auction blocks, put them in cotton fields, put them in inferior schools, put them in substandard housing, put them in scientific experiments, put them in the lowest paying jobs, put them outside the equal protection of the law, kept them out of their racist bastions of higher education and locked them into position of hopelessness and helplessness. The government gives them the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law…" Wright said that, and I agree with all of it.

And, like Wright, I agree that progressive politics in the last 40 years has affirmed the Cuban peoples' revolution, aided the anti-apartheid movement, opposed Reagan's war in Central America, and have maintained that Zionism is racism. But I'm an unapologetic secularist. I'm not into "damning" or waiting for God's wrath to smite anybody. I believe that the people here on earth are responsible for change. And just as important, I believe Obama is a piece of the story, not the whole story.

In the end, I'm against unthinking, uncritical and blind solidarity, be it racial, gender or sexually-related, etc. If solidarity makes you fall in line without asking where you're going, don't be surprised if you end up lost, or worse.

Lastly, would Obama denounce the statement that "America is the greatest purveyor of violence on the planet?" King said that. So, the unanswered question is how much room does racial solidarity allow Obama before the other edge of it cuts him, as it did the Clintons? Racial solidarity is a perilous thing indeed. **CP.**

Kevin Alexander Gray is a civil rights organizer in South Carolina and author of *Waiting for Lightning to Strike! The Fundamentals of Black Politics*, which will be published this summer by CounterPunch Books. He can be reached at kagamba@bellsouth.net.

Subscription Information

Subscription information can be found at www.counterpunch.org or call toll-free inside the U.S. 1-800-840-3683

Published twice monthly except July and August, 22 issues a year.

1- year hardcopy edition $45
2- year hardcopy edition $80
1- year email edition $35
2- year email edition $65
1- year email & hardcopy edition $50
1- year institutions/supporters $100
1- year student/low income, $35

Renew by telephone, mail or on our website. For mailed orders please include name, address and email address (if applicable) with payment. To renew by phone 1-800-840-3683 or 1-707-629 3683. Add $17.50 per year for subscriptions mailed outside the U.S.A.

Make checks or money orders payable to:
CounterPunch
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

L.A.'s Air: Weapon of Mass Destruction

By Jeffrey St. Clair

This is what it has come to: the air in L.A. is so toxic that a child born in the City of Angels will inhale more cancer-causing pollutants in the first two weeks of life than the EPA (not known for understating risks) considers safe for a lifetime.

This risk never goes away. It comes with the first breaths a child takes. Being born in urban California now means that life expectancy is reduced, chances of getting cancer are elevated. All this before you've inflicted any damage on yourself through smoking, drinking booze, eating fast food, or watching CNN.

The situation is spelled out in a report released by the National Environmental Trust titled "Toxic Beginnings." The report pins much of the blame for this situation on so-called TACs, or Toxic Air Contaminants. These are poisons spewed into the atmosphere from cars, trucks, heavy equipment and factories. Studies by the EPA and other agencies link TAC-exposure to cancer, birth defects, and other illnesses, such as asthma.

The National Environmental Trust report examined air quality and exposure to TACs in California's five most populous basins: Los Angeles, the San Joaquin Valley, the Sacramento Valley, the San Francisco Bay Area, and San Diego.

In Los Angeles, the air is so clotted with ten cancer-causing chemicals that residents there face a cancer risk 1,005 times the level considered "safe" by the EPA. And the most vulnerable to those risks are children, especially poor and working-class children.

Prior to the National Environmental Trust report, the unique risks faced by children have rarely been deemed worthy of calculation. The EPA and the California Air Resources Board, for example, issue an annual report on air emissions and their consequences on human health. However, those risks are based solely on calculations made about the amount of carcinogens inhaled over the lifetime of an average adult.

But recent medical literature shows that children are much more susceptible to these toxins than adults, and that exposure to toxic air early in life is much more dangerous than breathing the same foul air for more extended periods as an adult.

This has to do with the physiology of children. They inhale more air than adults, relative to their body weight. Thus, they are exposed to higher concentrations of cancer-causing chemicals.

The National Environmental Trust report took the data on TACs compiled by the Air Review Board and recalculated it to show the risks to children. It's not a pretty picture. The EPA (rather arbitrarily) sets a "one million standard" risk of getting cancer as its acceptable lifetime exposure risk. Children born and raised in these smog-laden California basins will

By the time L.A.-born children reach eighteen, they will have breathed enough toxic air to place them 344 times over what the EPA considers an acceptable lifetime exposure to these contaminants.

far exceed these levels very early in life.

For example, in San Francisco the average infant will exceed the EPA's lifetime exposure to toxic air pollutants in 19 days. In L.A., it takes only twelve days. By the time the average L.A.-born girl reaches her eighteenth birthday, she will have breathed enough toxic air to place her 344 times over what the EPA considers an acceptable lifetime exposure to these contaminants.

"The potential risk that a child rapidly accumulates in California for simply breathing will not go away when the child is older, even if the air is cleaner when the child reaches adulthood," the report warns. "Remarkably, if the carcinogens in California air were cleaned up to EPA's level immediately, a child born in California would still exceed the lifetime acceptable cancer risk by age four and an adult moving to California would exceed it in seven years."

Generally, these risks accumulate steadily, leading to cancers in adulthood. But there's also evidence that exposure to toxic air is behind the mounting level of childhood cancers. "There has been a steady, moderate increase in childhood cancers (ages zero to twenty) since the 1970s, which has not been explained by improved diagnostics," cautions a recent report by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. "Leukemias, lymphomas, and brain tumors are the most common childhood cancers."

The biggest culprit by far is particulate matter and chemicals belched out by diesel engines from trucks, cars, and "other mobile sources," such as farm and construction equipment.

Sue Martinez works at the Children's Hospital in Oakland and is a witness to the daily toll. "Diesel is the worst of the air pollutants, which our medical staff already sees through asthma cases," Martinez told me. "In West Oakland, diesel trucks line up at the Oakland ports from Saturday night through Sunday with their engines idling. By the time the ports open for business on Monday, our Emergency Department has begun receiving asthma emergencies. Asthma is the number one cause of emergency department admissions at our hospital."

But there are other sources as well, including dichlorobenzene (largely from pesticides), benzene (from oils and industrial greases), methylene chloride (from paint and paint removers), and formaldehyde (from adhesives and cleaning products).

The situation is so bad that even adults who have moved to California are not immune. In fact, the report reveals that, within a year, an adult breathing the air in one of California's major cities will exceed the lifetime exposure risk by more than a multiple of fifteen. Even if the diesel emissions were brought under control, exposure to current levels of these chemicals would cause a child to exceed the EPA's acceptable cancer risk by age four.

At a time when Bush Jr. was railing at Saddam Hussein for gassing his own people (with U.S. connivance, to be sure), his administration was coddling the coterie of oil and chemical companies turning the L.A. basin into a cancerous sink and poisoning infants and children across urban America. And instead of strengthening the Clean Act Air to deal with this homegrown problem, Bush and his cro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nies from Big Oil have been trying to rip out the few teeth that remain in the law, a move that will make cancer a birthmark of being born in California. **CP**

This is excerpted from Jeffrey St. Clair's new book, *Born Under a Bad Sky. Notes from the Dark Side of the Earth*, published by CounterPunch Books in 2008, now available on the CounterPunch website: www.counterpunch.org, or order by phone. Call toll free 1-800-840-3683 or 707-629-3683 outside the U.S.

LEE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

over into bitterness at the U.N., as the Myanmar regime successfully leverages the disaster to co-opt international organizations.

"Some Burmese aid workers and activists maintain the junta has not made any concessions, but the U.N. has made concessions to the regime.

"'Now people are putting the blame on the U.N. and the regime,' one NGO worker told the *Irrawaddy* on condition of anonymity. 'Nargis is now a cash cow for the regime and U.N. agencies [to raise money],' she said. ...

"One NGO worker said ... all aid workers should be welcomed no matter if Western or Asian. 'We shouldn't think that Westerners can do more and have more understanding.'

"'We now have some emergency cowboys who went to the delta region, but they have no clue how to help people and just keep praising their projects and asking for more money,' she said, referring to some Western U.N. staff members."

The United States and the West are left with the unpleasant and politically and morally risky options of hoping or ensuring that the Myanmar regime is unable to consolidate its economic and political position in the aftermath of the cyclone by reaching out to ASEAN.

In particular, the United States and the West will soon face the unpalatable truth that prompt, unstinting aid is needed to get the monsoon paddy – critical to Myanmar's self-sufficiency and the well-being of the people in the delta – planted within the next six weeks and, if the West attempts to leverage and manage that aid to minimize the benefits to the junta, the Asian nations may not go along.

As the United States reflexively vilifies the Myanmar regime even as its diplomatic leverage dwindles, it's clear Washington had a policy suited toward a festering crisis in Burma – but it does not appear to have a positive strategy to address the Burmese issue or engage the Myanmar regime in the aftermath of a titanic humanitarian catastrophe.

It's a problem shared by the Burma pro-democracy movement and some NGOs, which are infuriated at the regime's success in turning its disaster relief shortcomings into a humanitarian aid trump card. Like the Bush administration, they seem to be burning their bridges in frustration at the conciliatory attitudes of many foreign players in the catastrophe. **CP**

Peter Lee is a businessman who has spent thirty years observing, analyzing, and writing on Asian affairs. He can be reached at peterrlee_2000@yahoo.com.

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

Phone 1-800-840-3683 for excellent summer reading and CounterPunch t-shirts.

1st Class
Presort
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 269
Skokie, IL

First Class

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED